

Gospel and Sermon Transcript - 7th Sunday of Easter - June 1, 2025

We gather on this seventh Sunday of Easter,
continuing to ponder what it means to be a community
that is a witness to the resurrection,
a living witness in the Gospels today.

We will hear Jesus praying a prayer that is at turns perplexing
and reassuring, one in which Jesus prays that the witnessing community
would be one as he and the Father are one.

[Music]

Because of the way the Gospel is written,
and partly just something that I'm trying of late,
is that on the websites you will find extended commentaries
and things that are fairly specific and detailed
that don't always find their way into a sermon.

So you can think of it as bonus material if you'd like to visit that.

Today's plan is to share a few stories about what oneness looks like.

So it will be more of a sharing of stories today than perhaps a sermon.

The hymns to be announced, we'll do that as we go.

Lily, could I have you be the hymn announcer?

Great. Okay.

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John 17th chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus prayed, "I ask not only on behalf of these,
but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word,
that they may be one.

As you, Father, are in me, and I am in you,
may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given them,
so that they may be one as we are one.

And you and me, in them, and you and me, that they may be completely one,
so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them,
even as you have loved me.

Father, I desire that those also whom you have given me
may be with me where I am to see my glory, which you have given me,
because you have loved me before the foundation of the world.

Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you,
and these know you.

May they know that you have sent me.

I have made your name known to them, and I will make it known,
so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them,
and I in them, the Gospel of our Lord.

I want you to be seated.

The Sermon

Grace, and peace to you from the one who was, who is, and who is to come.

Among other things that we mark this time of year,
the 1700th anniversary of the convention at Nicaea, from which comes the creed,
that we will say later today.

Interesting fact about that.

At this convention where all the churches of the known world gathered,
it's the place where the church first began to split.

It split over understanding how the Holy Spirit relates to Father and Son,
and I'm not sure that that has been resolved 1700 years later.

And so when we read about Jesus praying for unity,
on this big road trip of the church, some of us in the back seat are saying the four
magic words

that many of you have heard on many a road trip yourselves.

Are we there yet?

Don't make me come back there.

Are we there yet?

I think there's plenty of evidence that would make us say not entirely.

There are Christian groups that are presently putting their loyalty to a political
party or a head of state,

or an ideology who are saying that they name the name of Christ.

And some of us are a little nervous about saying that that would be the kind of
unity that God has in mind,

or that maybe even we want to be part of.

On the other hand, to expect us all to be exactly the same,

that too is a pipe dream and maybe not terribly appetizing.

There's a difference between unity and uniformity, after all.

And what is that difference?

Imagine a potluck.

We don't all bring the same thing.

Some will bring deviled eggs, some will bring cabbage rolls, some will even bring pierogies,

and scalloped potatoes.

And it is a feast, a variety.

It is a feast that brings us together.

Now imagine that some enterprising pastor gets the bright idea to change it up a little at the potluck,

and he's in his blendomatic 6000, which is a 150 horsepower motor,

which could power your boat across the lake if you want,

but we're going to use it to blend up some food today.

So as you bring your gifts to the potluck, we're going to dump them into the blendomatic 6000,

we're going to fire up that motor and make up some potluck smoothies.

Some of you are turning a little green around the gills already.

Ah, the difference between unity and uniformity, I think, is that dramatic.

Asking us all to be identical is not asking us to be one,

but asking us to be united in purpose and in mission and in reason for being,

I think that's where unity lies.

I want to tell a series of stories today that seem to fall into three areas of catchment for me.

One is that we are united in the ways we gather, united because they're creative.

We are sometimes united in the ways we speak, and finally in the ways that we act.

One doesn't have to look too far to see the creativity that happens in gathering.

This congregation five years ago, for example, had one pastor who served one congregation,

and adjustment needed to be made.

Said congregation is in the process and has been for many years now

figuring out creative ways to share this space,

whether it's the worship space or whether it is the fellowship hall,

which is getting a lot of attention these days and a lot of care,

as you all as congregation discern a way forward about what is it going to mean for us to be in this neighbourhood.

That is one creative way of gathering, but there are more.

Sometimes there's no building at all.

Well, maybe not by design, but that's what happened to the good folk at St. John in Carmen, Manitoba.

Their first innovation was to share their church and their worship and their mission with an Anglican church.

They've been doing that for 15 years now, and by all accounts, it has been a fruitful and a meaningful mission to the people of Carmen, Manitoba.

I think it was in February or March that a fire struck and burned the building to the ground.

So, Pastor Trudy and her people, they needed to figure out how are we going to gather now.

They found a few places where they can have a Sunday worship,

but they've added a few things, like coffee get-togethers and other community gathering points to keep the people together,

even though there's not a building just now.

At the first service, I talked a bit about the South Shore Ministry area in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia,

only to find that a guest in the congregation said, "Oh, I used to live there,"

and she started to tick off the names of the communities that share two pastors now,

and one administrator who takes care of all of the legal and administrative things with payroll and reporting to CRA

and all the things that individual churches often ask one person to do.

Ten congregations and two pastors.

The journey started 25 years ago, we're told,

and here's the interesting fact, as I've heard people like Pastor Adam tell the story,

that it was the people, not the Synod Office or the Bishop or anybody who said,

"You know, you want to be thinking about ways of creatively being together."

They decided on their own to start having meetings,

and what has grown from it is the model that I'm describing now.

There was one rule that quickly came into place, and this just tickles me to no end.

The very last, last, last, last, last thing to talk about was what time is each church having their service,

and I gave them all sorts of freedom to figure out who are we, how are we in the community first,

and then the rest kind of takes care of itself.

There's a story about a particular naysayer who just thought this whole thing was a terrible idea

and thought so for decades until it transpired that the quilting group in the neighboring congregation

would welcome her happily, and it could be her group too.

So this group of ten congregations on South Shore has figured out how to be together

in their own buildings, in their own place, to do their own worship,

but to be in community with nine other congregations and to do projects together

in the community as well as between and among churches.

Also in Atlantic Canada, in Fredericton New Brunswick,

there is one congregation in the whole province that's connected with our ELCIC.

They reviewed their membership lately and they took a picture of all seven people.

Yeah, I'm not making this up. Who are members of the congregation?

Four of them under the age of 12.

They gather. Years ago they redeveloped, they repurposed a building.

It is now supportive housing with a community gathering spot for worship,

and this congregation, all seven of them, decided that, you know, there are a lot of lonely people in this building

who have to eat by themselves.

So regular meals for the people in that building and regular ministry.

So one size does not fit all, and these stories illustrate something else,

that I'm not talking about them, even though I've not met them all.

I'm talking about us, that this is something we are a part of,

just as we are part of, as we say in the Creed, one holy Catholic and apostolic church.

But not only do we gather creatively, sometimes we speak with a united voice.

Just this morning I read that Bishop Susan Johnson of the ELCIC, our Lutheran body here in Canada,

and the right reverend Ann Garmon, who is the interim primate for the Anglican Church of Canada,

have co-authored a statement to the Prime Minister asking for aid to be opened to the region of Gaza

because much of it is being constricted, and there are people starving,

and people suffering because aid is not getting into anyone.

This voice is particularly important, and it is about us once again,

that there are Christian colleges, hospitals, and churches in Palestine

whose very existence appears to be threatened, and who may not even be in existence in a year or two.

Sometimes we lift our voices on behalf of those maybe who have been silenced.

June marks the beginning of Pride Month across Canada and perhaps the world.

I think this is about us as well.

The Synod Office has made a commitment to be present at Pride parades throughout the Synod as best they can.

So this is three or four people who are making treks to lots of parades,

and I think they've committed to something like six or eight different parades over the course of the summer.

Along with that, though, besides a visible presence,

there is a committee that the Synod has developed that was introduced to us at Synod Convention about a year ago

called a Queer Committee.

People on that committee represent the LGBTQ population.

So they're at the table.

So instead of making decisions for somebody, the people who live the life most directly are the people who get to have a voice.

And this committee plans to travel the Synod to speak with others about ways that the church has sometimes hurt,

or excluded, or squelched their voice.

It is a hope that it is an act of reconciling.

Speaking of, there are entire synods in the ELCIC now that have become reconciling in Christ Synods,

which means that these are safe places for everybody.

Speech sometimes translates into action.

So besides speaking and besides gathering, we also act.

How many Sundays do we pray for God to somehow intervene and ameliorate the effects of climate change and damage?

It's an appropriate prayer.

And we learned that there's a project just being put together by Canadian Lutheran World Relief that promises to be the largest in its history.

The focus, and it's far away from here, but it's still us, Chad and Cameroon,

where climate damage has been significant enough, where livelihoods are threatened,

and Canadian Lutheran World Relief has met with local experts and local farmers and people who have proven approaches

that are already working not only to mitigate the problems, but to reverse some of that climate damage.

It won't be in too many weeks that we will hear more about this project and that resources are being sent out of all kinds for us to use in whatever ways we see fit.

But one of the programs will be to remind us that for a cost of \$50, one acre can be rehabilitated.

Imagine that pooled action across what is now becoming a small church, the evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada,

but still a church that acts as one.

Imagine what can happen. \$50 an acre multiplied across congregations and individuals from coast to coast to coast.

We also act in doing ministry in our own places with help, with partnerships.

Luther Seminary in Waterloo has just received a sizable grant from the Lilly Foundation in the U.S.

Part of the research that came of that now is going to become what is called "By Living Waters,"

a ministry out of the seminary where resources for the grant period at least will be free to any congregation wanting to work with leadership development

and help their people in their place so that there will be good, solid leadership from the members of the churches for a long time to come.

But that's the pastor's job.

Well, I got news for you.

Most of us are retirement age. Not to say we're retirement ready, but we're retirement age.

And yes, the numbers of pastors retiring is fitting very much the projections the Synod made, the Synod office made some say 20, no, I'm sorry, five years ago.

Five years ago.

The other thing that's true is I think there are two interns throughout our whole Senate, which goes from like Sue St. Marie to the East Coast.

I think there's one person who's going through the ordination candidacy process just now finishing that up.

So there's not this long line of pastors waiting for a call anymore like in my day, in our day, we called it draft day where we all put in where we wanted to be in the region of the country.

And we would gather in these rooms and there would be dozens of us, like 40, 50 of us in one seminary out of the eight waiting to be drafted.

Now there's like, our Senate, two, three, somewhere in the process.

We're ordaining about one or two pastors a year.

So that ought to tell us something that the ministry will indeed shift partly by necessity to the people who do the ministry in their own home towns and home churches.

So there will be empowerment there, though, and partnership with synods and with the seminary with this grant coming so that we can act together while still being a presence in our own local community.

We're in our own local neighbourhoods.

Are we very yet?

I think these stories are glimpses of the daylight that is coming that God is shining onto the world and onto creation.

There are glimpses. There's promise that that prayer that Jesus prayed so long ago is coming to fruition.

We may not see it all in our lifetime.

But evidently, Jesus believes in a God that answers prayer.

I think we can too.

I think we can hold close to that early line in John's gospel about why all of this matters.

Why is it that we need to gather creatively and why is it that we speak together and act together?

Because God so loved the world.

Amen